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ABSTRACT

This report contains summaries of papers and discussions from a conference at which about 1,000 people representing Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs), the social partners, and the European Commission gathered to debate and broaden the scope of the interaction between the commission and other European Union institutions and those involved at the grassroots level in the fields of economic and social action and social cohesion, as well as social partners involved in the social dialogue. Four topics that framed the discussions are summarized: (1) equal opportunities in the broadest possible sense; (2) employment; (3) social protection; and (4) working life as reshaped by the new economic and technological processes. Main issues, debate, and conclusions are summarized for each of these discussions. This report also contains the following: a statement of the NGO platform; a report of the Comite des Sages (six people known for their experience and independence); and a speech on "New Trends in Society" (Hugues de Jouvenel). The following position papers are included: "Europe Requires a Civil Dialogue and the Support of Its Citizens" (Padraig Flynn); "Social Demands: A Source of Dynamism and Development" (Jacques Santer); and "Parliament Calls for the Inclusion of a Social Dimension in the Treaty" (Stephen Hughes). Finally, the report contains some general conclusions from the sessions and individual conclusions from the forum partners. (KC)

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Social Europe

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A REPORT ON
THE FORUM

Working on European **Social Policy**

Brussels,
Palais des Congrès/
Paleis voor Congressen,
27-30 March 1996

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1 INTRODUCTION

On the eve of the beginning of the process to revise the Treaties at the Intergovernmental Conference [IGC] that opened in Turin on 29 March, many participants at the Social Policy Forum were hoping that the Member States of the Union would give some clear signs that Europe was going to take more account of its citizens' concerns: concerns about day-to-day life in a single market that is open to both people and capital, concerns about solidarity with the more disadvantaged members of society, and concerns about equality for all, free from discrimination.

The Forum was conceived as part of the Commission's response to Declaration 23 of the Maastricht Treaty which stresses the importance of cooperation between the EU and charitable associations, foundations and institutions responsible for social welfare establishments and services. Established by the Commission's White Paper on social policy in 1994, it takes the form of a continuous process whereby suggested approaches to policy issues are fed into the main strands of national and international policy-making during 1996 and 1997.

From 27 to 30 March 1996 about 1 000 people representing non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the social partners and the Commission, gathered in Brussels for the first European Social Policy Forum organized by the European Commission. The Forum aimed to broaden the scope of the interaction between the Commission (together with other EU institutions) and those involved at grassroots level in the fields of economic and social action and social cohesion, as well as social partners involved in the social dialogue. This objective was amply fulfilled. The halls of the Palais des Congrès were scenes of intense and rich debate.

Four topics were defined to frame the discussions: equal opportunities in the broadest possible sense, employment, social protection and, finally, working life as reshaped by new economic and technological processes.

The discussions had been the subject of lengthy preparations:

- The Commission had convened a 'Comité des Sages' which presented the Forum with a report in which they proposed the creation of a 'Bill of Rights,' a charter of fundamental rights for all citizens.

- Organizations in the social sector had set up a 'European Platform of social NGOs' to present shared positions on the various topics under discussion. At the end of the Forum, it became clear that the Platform would continue its reflections over time and would become a partner in this 'civil dialogue', the need for which was recognized by all.

The first of many conclusions was the decision to organize a second Social Policy Forum immediately after the IGC. In particular, the Forum gave the negotiators involved in the IGC a clear signal concerning the wish for social progress for all, and indicated to all European institutions the desire for social development that parallels economic development, by reaffirming, as one of the participants declared in the final session, that 'a single currency and economic convergence are merely the means, whereas social well-being is an end'. ■

The NGO Platform

The Platform of European social NGOs brings together European networks or federations in the associative sector working in the social domain. At the time of the Forum, it comprised 19 members, all involved in solidarity actions. Most are already federations, coalitions or networks, thus representing a large number of organizations.

The Platform was created especially for the Social Policy Forum, at which it clearly stated its general principle: 'Associations in the social sector have both the right and the duty to make proposals to encourage the European Union to assume its responsibilities as regards social policy.' The Platform went on to demand representation of the social sector on consultation bodies at Union level, and the establishment of a regular cooperation procedure to promote a broad dialogue.

NGOs have traditionally worked at local, regional and national level. Their non-normative approach and their commitment to areas where actions undertaken by the public and market sector are inadequate or non-existent can give the European level a new angle.

At the time of the Forum, the Platform brought together the following 19 organizations:

- Confederation of Family Organizations in the EC (Coface)
- European Liaison Committee for Social Housing (Cecodhas)
- Eurolink Age
- European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN)
- European Association of Organizations for Home Care and Help at Home
- European Disability Forum

- European Federation of National Organizations Working with the Homeless (Feantsa)
- European Forum for Child Welfare
- European Network of the Unemployed
- European Round Table of Charitable Social Welfare Associations (ETWelfare)
- European Social Action Network (ESAN)
- European Union Migrants Forum
- European Women's Lobby
- International Council on Social Welfare
- International Movement ATD Fourth World
- International Save the Children Alliance
- Mobility International
- Red Cross/EU Liaison Bureau
- Youth Forum

Report of the Comité des Sages

'To promote social rights is to promote citizenship,' said Maria de Lourdes Pintasilgo, Chair of the Comité des Sages, introducing the debate on the Comité's report. Convened by the European Commission, the Comité des Sages comprised, in addition to the Chair, six people known for their experience and independence. These are: Eduardo García de Enterría (Spain), Hartmut Kaelble (Germany), Louka Katseli (Greece), Frédéric Pascal (France), Bengt Westerberg (Sweden) and Shirley Williams (UK). The report presented at the Forum had an

Comité des Sages

The Comité des Sages, which was active from October 1995 to February 1996, is composed of the following members:

Maria de Lourdes Pintasilgo, Portugal, former Prime Minister;

Eduardo García de Enterría, Spain, professor of administrative law;

Hartmut Kaelble, Germany, professor of social history;

Louka Katseli, Greece, professor of economics;

Frédéric Pascal, France, economist;

Bengt Westerberg, Sweden, former Social Affairs Minister;

Shirley Williams, UK, former Education Minister.

impact on all the debates, and its conclusions were widely approved by all participants.

The mission of the report was to address the issue of fundamental rights, in particular social fundamental rights, in view of the revision of the EU Treaty. 'In addressing the question of social rights', Ms Pintasilgo points out, 'we are touching on the full range of rights which go to make up citizenship.' With social rights becoming intermingled with civil rights, the Comité sees only one logical consequence: the adoption of a 'Bill of Rights'. A first set of rights would promote civic and social rights in the Treaty, their application being assured by the Court of Justice of the European Union. They would include, in particular, equality before the law, the prohibiting of all forms of discrimination, equality between men and women, and free movement within the Union. A second set would be more general, promoting the right to education, work, social security and protection of the family, housing, etc. Finally, the Comité des Sages considers it necessary to lay down clearly the right to a minimum income for 'people who, despite their efforts, are unable to obtain paid employment and who have no other source of income.' Some of the rights the Comité proposes have been recognized already in the Member States.

Another proposal of the Comité envisages that the provisions on social policy – and the protocol on social policy included in the Maastricht Treaty in particular – should be grouped together in a single section, making them both more visible and more accessible. Furthermore, the Comité proposes broadening the terms of references of the Court of Justice of the European Union, in order to encompass the Council of Europe's European Convention on Human Rights.

This would be just a first stage. In the longer term the Comité recommends a wide-ranging consultation managed by an an *ad hoc* committee, involving, not only the social partners but also non-governmental organizations and national parliaments. The aim of such a consulation would be to draft a comprehensive Bill of Rights to be incorporated into a future EU Treaty.

At the same time, the Comité feels that there would be no point in including fundamental rights in the Treaty without having social policies to give them practical expression. Europe must innovate in the social field, it will succeed in postulating an attractive social model only if it takes account of the new competitiveness constraints arising from globalization, demographic and sociological developments, and of fundamental human needs. However, we must now define those areas in which Europe can provide an 'added value'. 'The European social model, if it is to be true to its vocation, must be original, which means innovative', concludes the Chair. ■

New trends in society

Hugues de Jouvenel, Director of Futuribles International

In his presentation of the overview report on broad economic, social and cultural trends, Hugues de Jouvenel highlighted the key words for the Forum: development, change, transformation and adaptation. While all parties adhere to the European social model, this must be adapted to new social situations, technological progress, the globalization of trade and demographic trends.

One virtually irreversible trend is the ageing of the European population, more dramatic when considered in terms of the projected imbalance in the age pyramid. Another feature is the advent of an information society. The internationalization of the economy must work in tandem with respect for diversity. The increase in women's occupational activity must be supported by allowing them equal access to top-level posts. The return to ethical values is of particular interest when taken in tandem with the new technologies.

De Jouvenel sees a high risk that unemployment will continue to rise and inequalities to deepen if the economic and social systems remain unchanged. This may result in an explosive situation as employment has been the foundation of the entire social edifice for the past half-century. Any plan to prevent a breakdown in social life resulting from unemployment must take into account the sweeping changes being wrought in the workplace. Forms of work are going to change, partly as a result of a demand for greater flexibility and partly because the concept of work will be replaced by the concept of function.

To face the challenge, de Jouvenel suggests that European societies should develop new activities in response to needs that are still not being met; adopt controlled regulation of the employment market that will enable people to enter and leave the market more easily, to work temporarily or on a part-time basis, while still performing other worthwhile activities; work towards a society based on 'time choice'; and redeploy social protection measures to make them more effective and transparent. Such innovations are being gradually introduced within enterprises and local groups, promoted by the social partners and the NGOs.

He concluded by remarking that the countries of western Europe are unique in having adopted a model of development that has rested on two main systems ever since the industrial revolution. He describes these as, firstly, the production system, in which people are divided into two roles – producer and consumer. The second is the social protection system, which, thanks to the social partners, is more developed in Western Europe than anywhere else. This system, guaranteed by the State, works by taking resources from the production system so as to be able to provide for people who are temporarily or permanently excluded from the production system as workers. As a result of these transfers, such people can still act as consumers.

De Jouvenel's speech made one point clear: to stay in place is to fall behind. ■

2 POSITIONS

Europe requires a civil dialogue and the support of its citizens

Pádraig Flynn, Member of the European Commission with responsibility for Employment, Industrial Relations and Social Affairs

We meet on the eve of the Intergovernmental Conference', observed Commissioner for Employment, Industrial Relations and Social Affairs, Pádraig Flynn in his opening address. 'We must make employment and social policy as central to the the IGC agenda as they are to achieving citizens' engagement in the European Project which the IGC seeks to progress. Our conclusions will be known by all governments as an important contribution to the work of the IGC,' he declared.

For Flynn, the future of the European social model is being negotiated and the Forum marks the beginning of a civil dialogue: this conference plays an important role in setting the Commission's future social action programme and signals the opening of a dialogue between NGOs and European Institutions. 'We can complete the circle by developing a civil dialogue' that will inform the political dialogue with Member States and the social dialogue with employers and trade unions.

The Commissioner felt that the Forum would help to balance economic and social objectives. If economic policy is about the quantitative distribution of scarce resources, then social policy is about their qualitative distribution: 'Economic policy determines how to produce, and how to maximize profit. Social policy seeks to determine under what conditions we produce and to influence the use to which that profit is put.' It must be understood that social policies are 'essentially a productive factor'.

Including the people

Europe's future lies partly in its enlargement and partly in its political construction, but also in the development of a Citizens' Europe. 'The first two visions cannot succeed

without the bonding represented by the third.' Employment is the cornerstone of this development, a crucial element of the European social model that is vital to the well-being of Europe's citizens, to the strength of public finances and to the maintenance of social-protection systems.

Flynn called for support of the European Pact of Confidence for Employment introduced by Jacques Santer, President of the European Commission, claiming that it is because of the weakness of the Treaty's initiatives as regards employment that people feel uninvolved in the construction of Europe. 'It must now be clear that we can no more achieve the great structural reforms we require, individually, as nations, employers or trades unions, public, private or voluntary sectors, than we can deliver macro-economic stability within one set of national borders.' ■

Social demands: a source of dynamism and development

Jacques Santer, President of the European Commission

I am appealing for a new approach to employment and social issues as productive factors that lie at the heart of our political project.' Several times during his introductory address, the President of the European Commission, Jacques Santer, pointed to the importance of reconciling economic and social objectives: 'There can be no social progress without economic progress; but, conversely, economic wealth cannot be built in a social desert.' He even added that 'the social dimension is not a cost or a burden, but rather a source of dynamism which will enable us to take on the challenges of the future, including that of international competition.' Santer explained his recent initiative, the European Pact of Confidence for Employment, to the audience: 'There is a need to mobilize people. Dialogue is essential and nothing can be done without grassroots involvement. We must set out on the road towards a more active, participatory society.'

A Europe for all

Santer welcomed the work accomplished by the Comité des Sages, 'whose influence will be felt beyond the Social Forum and will become an important point of reference for the Intergovernmental Conference.' The Report shows that the time has come for the EU to give itself a social identity amounting to more than just the social counterpart of the developing market.

He noted some strong similarities between the proposals put forward by the Comité and those the Commission have set out for the IGC.

Firstly, the 'social dimension ranks alongside the citizenship issue'. The European social model marks the fact that, over and above our historical and cultural diversity, there are certain shared ways of organizing our societies.

Secondly, the 'social dimension must be dynamic and forward-looking':

- It is a response to the profound changes Europe is going through such as the opening and internalization of economies, the rapid introduction of new technologies, the ageing of the population and the massive increase in women's participation in the labour market. Santer describes these trends as 'irreversible'. Others, like unemployment, poverty and social exclusion, as well as the crisis affecting our social protection systems 'may seem to be inevitable structural changes, but are not necessarily so'.

- It sets out a project for a modern society in which 'we have to change so as to stay ourselves'. This means a 'different response to the whole concept of work'. It means 'diversifying the forms of social representation, acknowledging the complementarity between the social partners and the social players who are not directly connected with the world of work'.

- It is an integral part of enlargement, since the people of Europe will only be prepared to take risks for one another if they feel a common bond of togetherness.

Thirdly, the 'social dimension is anything but the enemy of competitiveness' and the real challenge lies 'in getting the mix of solutions right'.

Fourthly, 'the social dimension requires input from everyone'. Santer emphasized the Comité's message, that 'the European project is not something which is external to our people, it belongs to them'.

Throughout his speech, the President stressed the importance of partnership and, in particular, the complementarity of action taken by the social partners and the NGOs. 'With the destandardization of forms of employment and the drive to combat unemployment, the role of the NGOs has become increasingly important in the world of work, coinciding with the increasing prevalence of local jobs, and with more intensive discussion of the future of paid employment and the role of unpaid activities as a factor for integration in our societies.' Santer felt that there should be possible partnership envisaged between social partners and NGOs: 'Perhaps, in the not too distant future, it may be possible to talk of a veritable societal pact – diametrically opposed to an 'à la carte' society or Europe – which will be capable of mobilizing all the active elements in our society'. ■

Parliament calls for the inclusion of a social dimension in the Treaty

Stephen Hughes, Chairman of the European Parliament's Committee on Social Affairs and Employment

Stephen Hughes traced the similarities between the proposals of the Commission and the Comité des Sages and the Parliament's aspirations. These are the shared wishes to see the Treaty include the social dimension, human rights, equal treatment and the fight against all forms of discrimination: 'Equal opportunities for men and women must be included as a fundamental right and Article 119 must also refer to social, political and family rights.'

He argued that it is essential that the social dimension of the Union be officially acknowledged. The Treaty must include the fight against exclusion and discrimination among the Union's powers and responsibilities. Employment has to be the main objective of all policies, particularly economic and social policies. It, too, must be included in the future Treaty.

Although all parties are in agreement, Hughes continued, unfortunately progress is not going smoothly. He asked, 'What does the social dimension of Europe mean for the 52 million people the Commission has classified as excluded, while the Union's ministers have rejected even the most modest proposals under the programme to combat exclusion? What does the social dimesion mean for the 18 million people who are considered to be unemployed and for whom the Union has no means of action? What does the Union itself mean for people who are travelling and constantly come up against obstacles to free movement?'

He asked if it is possible to speak of a social dimension when freedom of association is not even mentioned in the Treaty. Hughes does not regard the balance between the social dimension and the economic dimension as having been reached. In order to achieve this, he said, the aid and support of NGOs is vital, since the Member States' governments at the IGC are beyond the scope of public democratic control.

Concluding his address, Hughes called on European institutions to ensure that the significant means and powers granted for social dialogue be complemented by the granting of means and powers for civil dialogue, and expressed support for any efforts the Commission might make in this respect. ■

SESSION I:

Equal opportunities

Rapporteur: Pauline Conroy, University College Dublin, Ireland

Main issues

Rapporteur Pauline Conroy stated that the persistence of discrimination, and the emergence of it in new forms, are a challenge to the social model, fundamental values and social justice with which the Member States identify.

Equality of opportunity is about power, and reflects societal diversity. The session aimed to broaden the scope beyond the gender basis. Those suffering from or fighting discrimination include the disabled, migrants, children and young people, the elderly and women excluded from the decision-making process. Often individuals must contend with an accumulation of more than one form of discrimination.

European citizenship is problematic for a number of groups. Legally resident non-Community persons do not have equal rights of movement or of political participation. Minority cultures and ethnic groups feel that they might be pushed aside by majority ethos. Children and disabled people do not have equal access, status or rights to social and economic integration.

> ***'The primary forms of discrimination are exclusion, unemployment and violation of the right to employment and to housing. This is a far remove from the general principles of a Europe that is respectful of citizens' rights and of their implementation. Discriminations are piling up'***
> **– Tara Mukherjee, Forum of Migrants, UK.**

> ***'The principle of non-discrimination is a general and absolute principle that is reflected in various rights to equality, whilst still recognizing the unique features of each group'*** **– Laure Batut, European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), France.**

Debate

The session's aim to broaden the approach to equal opportunities was well received by many people. While all forms of discrimination are equal, the question of how to compare different aspects of equal opportunities was raised. The person suffering from physical or mental disability is facing different problems from women, whose equal opportunity difficulties are primarily those of history and attitude. These are separate again from those of immigrant minorities seeking both equality and respect for their right to cultural and social difference.

Barbara Helfferich, European Women's Lobby, Belgium, was disappointed to see equal opportunities for women and men linked to the fight against all other forms of discrimination. She argued that discrimination between women and men is a transversal issue: 'There are disabled women and immigrant women ... who are doubly discriminated against.'

The session debated whether equal opportunities must begin with those most marginalized. Some contributors commented that poor working conditions such as unpaid work, unrecognized care and underfunded NGO work all construct barriers to equality. However, the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) pointed out that, as a mainstreaming exercise, equal opportunities carries the danger of fragmenting groups into categories working against each other's interests. The Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe (UNICE) was concerned that positive discrimination can also be unjust.

It was pointed out that equality has an economic meaning. Chair Kamlesh Bahl, Equal Opportunities Commission, UK, argued that 'the fight against discrimination does not cost very much'. Some participants agreed that it costs less than the social breakdown which results from discrimination. Inequality is prejudicial to growth and discrimination is expensive. Investing in equality is like investing in research and development as it creates new wealth and contributes to culture and humanity. Others countered that combating discrimination must cost, as the ultimate discrimination is poverty and exclusion from employment, training and lack of housing.

> *'To break down the barriers of discrimination is to mark the development of society. Equal opportunities cut across and include all other topics'* – **Kamlesh Bahl, Equal Opportunities Commission, UK.**

> *'In view of non-discrimination between families, policies could be developed which address all families, whatever their model, aiming at increased autonomy for each of their members'* – **William Lay, Confederation of Family Organizations in the European Community.**

Chair Johan Wesemann, of the European Disability Forum, the Netherlands, said that NGOs must give a stimulus to the European Institutions. Quentin Oliver, Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action, responded by stressing the importance of such civil dialogue. His comment that NGOs must structure themselves so that this dialogue will 'not finish with our proposals ending up in the filing tray' was well received. Agnès Planchais of the Civic and Social Women's Union, France, suggested that a demand be made for all decisions taken in Europe to be accompanied by an impact study as regards the level of equal opportunities for all. However, Helfferich proposed a more radical view. She argued that mainstreaming is about integrating equal opportunities in existing policies and structures that have created discrimination. She said what was really needed 'is to create new structures and policies that guarantee equal opportunities'.

Conclusions

The working group recognized that equality may not be the answer to all problems facing society. Legislative changes are necessary and fundamental, but cannot succeed without changes in attitude which require a different approach. Economic and social developments are not ends in themselves but means to achieve a spirit of equality.

There was a general consensus that the European social model is a success, and that progress has been made. However, the session affirmed that equal opportunities are a dynamic process, rather than something arrived at, and that this carries profound implications for the structure of European societies

The process of examining and measuring the outcomes of equal opportunities and the structures generating poverty and exclusion contributes to social cohesion. The principles of equality, solidarity and participation are shared within the European Community. Promoting these values may mean reducing or even arresting market mechanisms. If this is the price to be paid for respecting shared socio-cultural values, perhaps it is a price worth paying.

> *'People who are excluded are demanding very concrete action. A direct democracy has to be created'* – **John O'Connell, European Anti-Poverty Network, Ireland.**

NGOs should coordinate themselves to prepare for intensive dialogue with the Community Institutions, which could lead to participation in monitoring Structural Funds. NGOs need to be integrated into the ongoing dialogues already taking place among the social partners. NGOs may have to examine their own applications of equal opportunities and develop clear and open presentations of themselves in the European arena.

> *'We must clarify the notion of the "third sector". Does this mean that we come in on a third level, below the social partners, or does the notion of a "third sector" imply that we have equal importance with the other sectors?'* – **Theodore Dellis, Mobility International, Belgium.**

> *'You could go on and on refining your demands. Until you have a skilful political strategy and until you lobby the Council, your efforts will have little effect'* – **Jan Noterdaeme, European Business Network, Belgium.**

> *'NGOs are not perfect and have their own attitudes. We ourselves must put equal opportunities into practice'*
> – **Mary Nettle, European Disability Forum, UK.**

The session recommended that NGOs be represented at the Economic and Social Committee. Another Forum should be held early in 1997, and the Platform established for the Forum should be given permanent status. It was agreed that a study of the composition and characteristics of the NGO sector would be useful. At the same time, resources are needed for NGOs to revitalize the debate on social policy, poverty, social exclusion and rights. ■

SESSION II:

Employment

Rapporteur: Ides Nicaise, Catholic University of Louvain, Belgium

Main issues

The session addressed the question of whether a Europe with full employment and social rights for all citizens is a real possibility. What should the relationship be between employment and the right to work and does integration necessarily go hand-in-hand with employment?

Five principle areas emerged in debate: general employment policy, local employment initiatives, flexibility, work sharing and the right to integration.

> ***'We have reached a period of precariousness and poverty in a society that is not even in recession'***
> **– Jean Pierre Yonnet, ETUC, Belgium.**

Debate

In relation to the European Confidence Pact for Employment, participants discussed the importance of quantifiable objectives for growth and employment; reduction in working time, through job-sharing or rotation; and alternative financing for social security. Some participants referred to Commissioner Monti's recommendations to harmonize indirect taxation, and proposed that additional revenue gained in this way should be used to reduce individuals' social security contributions.

There was a general consensus that NGOs have a great deal of experience in local employment initiatives (ILE/LEI), and indeed some NGOs perceive themselves as employment initiatives. Attention was drawn to the important economic value of NGOs, as employers and, indirectly, as forces for economic growth and innovative market development. It was argued that these contributions are similar to those of small and medium-sized enterprises, and therefore NGOs should be regarded as more than simply social organizations. However, NGOs have two types of objectives, both of which necessitate permanent financial support. Firstly, they produce something for the common good, for which generally people will not, or cannot, pay. Secondly, they aim to integrate disadvantaged groups, who cannot be paid only acccording to productivity.

The discussion on issues of flexibility of work was wide-ranging. Speaking for the employers, Hakan Lundgren of the Swedish Employers Confederation described how

changes in the market-place are triggered by consumers, and thus it is the consumer who has imposed flexibility of working hours and location.

> *'Studies conducted by the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs have shown that a third of new jobs are in new enterprises, a third are in 5-10% of existing enterprises with a high level of innovation, creativity, research and development and export activity; and a third are in others'*
> **– Wilfried Beirnaert, UNICE, Belgium.**

This trend towards flexibility is boosted by developments in information technology (IT). While accepting the importance of these changes, the debate centered on the limits of flexibility, with particular regard to the social dimension. Flexibility has implications for workers' health, for private and family life, and may lead to longer working hours, an increased number of poorly paid and insecure jobs, and the possible exploitation of women who are more engaged in part-time work than men. It was also pointed out that it is important for employers to have a stable and productive staff. It is in their interest for workers to have a sense of loyalty to the enterprise.

> *'A third of workers in Europe have health problems. For example, people working a three-shift system die younger than people working a continuous shift. This flexible system will lead to problems with insurance schemes'*
> **– John Toal, Internationaler Bund, Germany.**

> *'The decision factors are the general reduction in working times and the reduction in overtime, which would release time for leisure and allow the creation of conditions for new forms of work to emerge'* – **Inge Kaufmann, ETUC, Germany.**

> *'Some people are sick because they work too much and others are sick because they are not working at all'*
> **– Frédérique Deroure, Réseau Européen du Travail et de la Vie Familiale (in the parallel session 4).**

The theme of work-sharing provoked some different responses. While NGOs argued for maximum redistribution of work, employers' groups and trade unions showed differences on three points: employers stated that a reduction of working time while maintaining salary is simply not possible. The unions agreed that this issue is problematic. Employers are in favour of promoting flexible forms of work such as part-time work, whereas the unions were in favour of general reductions in working time. Finally, employers believe that issues which have a direct impact on the organization of work in the company are best dealt with at company level, while unions are eager to have negotiations at sectoral, national and even international level to minimize problems of competition.

'We feel that there is an alternative, which is truly to commit to the idea of part-time and flexible working, or to try to find a new way of reducing working times that also reshapes ways of life. We cannot abandon the idea of stable employment. The question of a 35-hour working week, without loss of pay and accompanied by job creation, is still a major European project. People are talking about a 32-hour, four-day working week, which would make it possible to secure new forms of socialization, new forms of participation and a new way of life'
– *Chantal Rey, Confederation Générale du Travail, France.*

The session regarded integration as twofold, comprising the individual right to integration and laws on integration. The participants saw problems with job-seekers working for social benefit. It was felt that, while such schemes are in principle a good idea, satisfying the individual's need for training and employment, care must be taken to prevent degradation of working conditions in this area. There should be choice of work, good working conditions and the right of recourse to law if necessary. There was discussion of a guaranteed right to integration. This could include the automatic right to public services, and additional guaranteed services for those out of work beyond a certain time span.

'Some people think that all the passive expenditure on benefits is a social waste and advocate a more active commitment, whereby job seekers are put "at the service of the community". We have launched an experiment in some disadvantaged areas in which people's needs have been analysed: safe transport. Local young people have proved to be wonderful travelling companions on the bus, especially for elderly people. This is an example of turning passive expenditure into active expenditure' – **Léon Dujardin, European Social Action Network, France.**

'The fight against unemployment and the fight against poverty are not one and the same. Neither the British nor the German model has succeeded in eliminating major poverty; even at the time of full employment, there was a second labour market, which was at the root of persistent and increasing poverty'
– Xavier Godinot, ATD Quart Monde, Belgium.

Conclusions

All participants recognized the importance of a wide partnership in the fight against unemployment. Some doubt was expressed as to whether the economic and monetary union and an employment strategy are compatible. Employment and social rights have broad convergences, and chapters on these issues should be integrated into the Treaty on European Union. The European Confidence Pact for Employment must integrate precise and measurable objectives with regard to employment,

reduction and sharing of working time, and promotion of alternative systems of social security financing. There was general agreement on the role of the local level and the new services in stimulating employment.

> *'I compare the convergence policy of the economic and monetary Union to a swaying rope, hence the term "tightrope walker's paradox": if you sway to the left, you fall into the abyss of debt; if you sway to the right, you fall into the pit of deflation. So, the only way forward is straight ahead'* – **Ides Nicaise, Catholic University of Louvain, Belgium.**

> *'We have to move beyond the traditional formulas. Ten years ago, we entered the welfare spiral, with larger and larger sums being swallowed up every year. We are now caught between the two models of society: the industrial model and the post-industrial model, for which the notions of employment and activity need to be reinvented'* – **Jacques Labigne, European Anti-Poverty Network, France.**

It is clear that employment matters cannot be separated from social rights. Working conditions, security and worker protection are still very important, especially for those in atypical work and micro-enterprises.

> *'How can we develop both jobs and rights? The parallel sessions on "employment" and "social protection" need to find a place of convergence, but this has not happened at this Forum, where our work is reproducing the traditional divisions: employment, employment policies and social protection are seen as separate entitites'* – **Jean-Pierre Dardaud, L'Europe de la Grande Solidarité, France.**

With regard to flexibility, it was agreed that there should be maximum use of negotiation margins, perhaps resulting in using higher productivity to reduce working time in order to circumvent the problem of salary payment. Overtime can be an extreme problem, and people should be given free time, not money. Unfortunately, in the southern Member States particularly, salaries are so low that overtime is seen as essential by workers. It was suggested that a guaranteed minimum income be established, which should be related to the average earnings in each Member State.

The NGOs welcomed the possibilities afforded to them by the Structural Funds. They recommended better targeting for the most disadvantaged job seekers, perhaps by fixing quotas for priority groups, and the possiblility of providing guaranteed loans to NGOs. They also asked to simplify procedures and to make local employment initiatives more secure. A problem for NGOs is the tendency of big organizations and public authorities to allocate large grants, thus excluding smaller initiatives which could benefit hugely if such administrative problems were tackled.

'In Ireland, people who have found work over the past few years have not been members of the most marginalized social groups. We have an enormous problem in terms of the long-term unemployed and we need to be able to introduce quotas for people who have been unemployed for a long time, who have the most difficulty in gaining access to programmes. The decentralization of these training schemes and programmes is very important. We need local partnerships and advancement programmes within the framework of the fight against poverty, particularly as regards long-term unemployment, education and a minimum income' – **Hugh Frazer, Combat Poverty Agency, Ireland.**

The idea of right to integration was the topic of a draft directive on the fight against social exclusion some years ago. Some participants proposed that the European Commission should relaunch this project.

NGOs demanded not only that they be consulted every 18 months, say, via the Forum, but that they be involved in a permanent, structured way in transforming employment policies into life-long and continuing training policies; that they be included as partners in a programme to combat unemployment and aid the most disadvantaged groups; that they be consulted about directives concerning flexible or atypical forms of work; that they participate in the training and integration of the weakest social groups, particularly the long-term unemployed; and that they be able to introduce quotas for long-term unemployed people who have difficulty in gaining access to these programmes. ■

SESSION III:

Social protection

Rapporteur: Maurizio Ferrera, University of Pavia, Italy

Main issues

The participants came together to discuss three principal questions:

What are the main changes in the structure of European society to which social protection has to adapt?

What are the constraints on, and opportunities for, reform and what part can the social partners and NGOs play in the reform process?

What part can the European Union play in social protection?

Debate

The diagnosis of the challenges facing Europe was the least controversial issue. Demographic change, the transformation in family and social relationships, increased participation by women in the labour market, radical changes in production methods, work organization and the competitive profile of Europe in the global economy all point to the need to reconsider the aims of social protection and, in particular, to readjust its institutions. However, it was emphasized that readjustment does not necessarily mean dismantling, or withdrawing from the collective commitment to solidarity and cohesion. Indeed, it was agreed that this commitment is an indispensable element of the European model of society.

One concern which emerged very clearly was the risk of creating a split society, in which a large sector of second-class citizens are relegated to, and virtually trapped in, a ghetto of means-tested assistance or exclusion wages. However, it was also stressed that for some countries with gaps in protection systems, particularly in southern Europe, the introduction of welfare benefits for people without income would be a step forward in the fight against exclusion and poverty.

Other topics touched on included the individualization of social rights and the relationship between social protection and employment. Various speakers acknowledged the need to move towards an 'employment-friendlier' protection system, but opinions differed on specific strategies for achieving this aim, especially as regards the consequences of benefit schemes on employment incentives.

The subject of the 'welfare mix', or new ways of sharing work between citizens and families, the State, social partners and NGOs, especially non-profit NGOs, attracted considerable attention. The representatives of the European Platform of NGOs

illustrated the contribution these organizations could make in the social sector, particularly with regard to public services. However, they made it quite clear that NGOs and the State must complement each other. Solidarity and equal opportunities have to remain a public responsibility, at least with regard to regulation.

The problem of the cost of readjustment was foremost in the minds of participants, not because social protection is to be regarded only as an expense, but rather that, like all investments, it requires resources. Many speakers identified specific obstacles to reform of social protection systems such as public deficit and debt, labour costs and the protests of taxpayers. Participants stressed the possibility of recovering resources through increased efficiency in service provision, for example by introducing new incentive systems. But differences emerged between trade unions and NGOs and the employers. The former maintained that the main priority is to find new stable sources of funds such as ecological, capital and value added taxes, while the employers wanted to shift resources between items of social expenditure, increasing the selectivity and 'targeting' of benefits. The employers pointed out that there can be no social progress without the participation of enterprises which create long-term jobs. In their view, an excessively high level of social protection has undermined job creation.

The discussion on the role of the European Union showed broad consensus that the internal market and economic and monetary union (EMU) have major implications as regards social policy and therefore raise serious technical questions on coordination, convergence and Community standards, in addition to political questions. The wisdom of EMU or the necessary preceding national budget reform measures were not challenged, but more than one speaker raised questions about the timing which they felt to be too tight, and the criteria, believed to be too rigid and flawed by not including any indicators of social convergence or employment growth. The trade unions and NGOs are looking for increased participation of the Union on constitutional recognition of social rights and incorporation of the Social Protocol in the Treaty. On the other hand, employers' representatives were less keen on strengthening the institutional hand in social affairs, stressing that the principle of subsidiarity should be reinforced. However, employers wished to see greater formal coordination between economic and monetary policy and social policy by the Council of Ministers, while also recommending greater horizontal integration of decision-making on economic and social matters within the Commission.

Conclusions

Since it has contributed to the modernization of our societies, social protection should continue to be one of the factors promoting progress, growth, and competitiveness.

Participants agreed that solidarity and cohesion are not incompatible with productivity and the proper functioning of the economy. On the contrary, solidarity and productivity cannot only be reconciled, but are in many respects synergetic.

There is a need to promote more active protection, focusing on inclusion and preventing beneficiaries from being segregated from the rest of society. It was pointed out that the term 'protection' itself was sometimes unfortunate, due to its

paternalistic overtones. It is essential that social programmes do not stigmatize the people for whom they are intended, but keep them firmly bound into the social fabric.

Solidarity and equal opportunities have to remain a public responsibility, at least with regard to regulation. Representatives of European regions also want to be more involved in the new welfare mix.

With regard to cost, both sides stressed that the entire range of public benefits, including tax relief, should be scrutinized to identify areas of waste, and distortions in allocation and distribution.

Many of the comments on the role of the EU betrayed something of a conflict between the wish to create solidarity and cohesion in Europe and the desire to uphold the specific traditions of protection in each country. However, the strongest signal is the need to ensure that there is a dynamic balance between national and supranational solidarity, in the increasing awareness that these are two sides of the same coin.

'NGOs are taking action on the ground, for example, against poverty or in favour of the homeless and the unemployed; NGOs identify with the hopes and expectations expressed, but these differ from one country to another. Preparation for the Forum within the framework of the Platform of European NGOs has allowed the opening of a new dialogue at European level. This is a dialogue that we welcome and are willing to pursue'
– **Ruth Brand, European Anti-Poverty Network, Germany.**

'We must broaden the base of social security contributions. This would be justified both from the economic viewpoint (to ease the burden of contributions on labour costs) and from the point of view of solidarity. This would, in particular, make it possible to reduce the bizarre inequality whereby it is often workers and employers alone who finance social protection. And we must include the funding of social protection in irreversible legislative texts that put equality first' – **Sylvie Girard, ETWelfare, France.**

SESSION IV:

The future of working life in the information society

Rapporteur: Ian Miles, University of Manchester, United Kingdom

Main issues

New information technologies are going to change attitudes to work. The aim of this session, focusing on a new area for some NGOs, was to move from talking about broad pressures and organizational strategies, through a focus on the changing nature and significance of working life, to issues that connect the formal economy of employment and wages to the informal sectors of voluntary work, care in families and similar activities.

> *'We must not focus solely on teleworking, which is just a small element of the information society. The information society concerns education, information, citizenship and everything else'* – **Bengt Westerberg, Comité des Sages, Sweden.**

Debate

Organizational changes are taking place, most notably the reduction of corporate hierarchies, concentration on core competencies while outsourcing many other activities, networking new alliances and user-supplier relations, combining to result in a general shift to smaller productive units. There is a threat of polarization between a core workforce in relatively stable positions with traditional benefits from employment, principally men aged 25-50, and a large number of employees in non-standard working arrangements such as part-time and temporary positions, subcontracting and telework. While new arrangements may meet some employees' desires, there was some concern that teleworkers are liable to fall off the career ladder.

> *'Either Europe rides the wave of new technologies or it falls inexorably into recession'* – **Luc Soete, University of Limburg, The Netherlands.**
>
> *'All the studies are based on employers' demands and needs. But we forget to consider the demands of employees and, even more so, the people who are not employees, people who do not have a job and would very much like to have one'* – **Lesley Sutherland, European Women's Lobby, UK.**

> ***'Small units comprising about 200 people are currently the best organized. I am not speaking only of small enterprises, because large enterprises can organize themselves into small units'***
> **– Bruno Vicaye, OECD.**

Chair Luc Soete, University of Limburg, The Netherlands, stated that these issues are usually seen 'in terms of the economy or deregulation, but never in terms of the social consequences or impact on people's lives'.

Responses to these changes include new requirements for higher levels of skills, with associated needs for education and training, and a shift in the labour force towards more white collar and skilled jobs, increased emphasis on teamwork, with a greater need for trust in the new less hierarchical organizations.

It emerged that gendering of the labour market is very apparent when comparing traditional workers with those undertaking non-standard working arrangements. Concern was expressed that women will be excluded from more rewarding careers. However, it was also noted that the restructuring of work could take into account such issues as the requirements to adapt working hours to meet needs for child and family care. Participants were concerned about the effects of frequent changes of jobs and/or temporary work on families, especially where geographical mobility is required. Family issues need to be taken into account in telework and flexible work schemes, alongside the extension of rights to training, educational access and social security.

The trade unions saw two possible scenarios: either employers will use new technologies to cut jobs, reduce responsibilities and relocate, leading to a loss of motivation among workers, or technologies will be used to develop responsibility, delegate, teach people to work on the basis of mutual equality, invest in training and develop 'time choice', which will allow worker participation.

> ***'Companies have dismissed thousands of workers and are now earning money thanks to new technologies. Companies must be forced to reinvest in employment all the money they earn as a result of information technologies'***
> **– Peter Lamb, Eurocadres, UK.**

> ***'We need some more ideas about what new technologies could create in terms of employment'*** **– Joe Gallagher, European Anti-Poverty Network, Ireland.**

While new systems do seem to support models of participatory democracy rather than familar mechanisms of representative democracy – and the likelihood is that the information society will facilitate new forms of political mobilisation and action – many participants felt that on the contrary, new marginalized groups will arise: those who have neither the skills for, nor access to, new technology. The discussion emphasized the threat that some new forms of work are liable to generate social exclusion, leading to isolation, decreased access to collective channels of representation and lowered availability of a range of rights and benefits associated

with conventional employment. The solution should include systems of rights that include new forms of work wherever possible. Existing social security and benefit systems need revision so as to relieve 'poverty traps' and remove the obstacles to re-entry into employment.

One of the points made in the discussion was that some NGOs have taken the lead in using IT, particularly its networking capabilities. Many NGOs still have to enter this world, however, and they should find considerable opportunities to participate in creating new IT systems and applications, for internal information management, networking with other organizations, and communicating with clients and the general public. As they become more proactive with respect to IT, NGOs will have to identify and diffuse good practice in its use.

> ***'The private sector could learn a lot from the voluntary sector, which knows how to unite and form networks, without competition and without power struggles'*** **– Catherine Shelley, Church Action on Poverty, UK.**

Participants were reminded that perceptions of employment values will have to change. It will be a long-term project to challenge this centrality of employment as it is linked to traditional forms of work.

Conclusions

Technology is an important resource for social action, but it is how it is used, its organizational context and the evolution of design and implementations rather than the existence of technology itself which determines its so-called impact. Development is not determined by technology, but by governments who put technologies at the service of individuals and society. Politicians must not hide behind the laws of the marketplace. It is important, too, to avoid imposing single solutions and models as information societies are bound to be diverse. Policies will have to accommodate this.

An important debate about rights of universal access to information technology, especially for disadvantaged groups and rural areas must be launched. Training schemes must be set up to provide people with new tools.

Different arrangements in terms of working hours, the lifetime pattern of work, periods of training and transition between and in occupations will be required, and it is necessary to maximize the benefits and minimize the costs of such new arrangements.

NGOs should be able to play a role in the creation of information societies. They have to be involved both in identifying problems and in finding and implementing solutions. Their participation can range from action at the grass roots through to dialogue with European Union and governmental institutions. There will be a need for new channels of communication within NGOs as well as between NGOs and (inter)governmental organizations. ■

3 CONCLUSIONS

General conclusions from the parallel sessions

1. It was considered that the IGC must include specific chapters on employment and social policy in the Treaty, with a particular view to social and human rights following the proposals of the Comité des Sages.

2. The European Platform of NGOs should be maintained and developed for the long term. NGOs must communicate better with each other in order to be able to participate with European institutions. The Social Policy Forum should be repeated on a regular basis.

3. NGOs want to consolidate their position in the decision-making, through more structured partnership with Community Institutions and the social partners. The civil dialogue should complete the social dialogue.

4. All employers, in the profit-making sector as well as in the non-profit-making sector, shold respect working conditions and equal opportunities and embrace ethical employment practices and transparency.

Individual conclusions from the forum partners

1. Council of Ministers

Matelda Grassi, Italian Presidency

Matelda Grassi's summary of issues noted that while the social model must change, it should remain faithful to itself. However, there is no easy solution, especially to the problem of employment and the lack of cohesion. Giving highest priority to the restoration of confidence throughout Europe, Grassi welcomed President Santer' s Confidence Pact for Employment. She pointed to the importance of NGOs which are closer to the grass roots and make it possible to go beyond what is done by

institutions: 'I believe that the solutions will come not from major projects but from a whole range of small initiatives – there is a path to be beaten here.'

2. Platform of European social NGOs

Soscha Gräfin zu Eulenburg, Red Cross, Germany

'This Forum must not be the only one of its kind. Europe must become a permanent forum'. Countess Eulenburg emphasized the efforts of the NGOs in the social sector represented by the Platform to speak with one voice, despite the diversity of their roles. 'NGOs in the social sector are playing a vital role in expressing, revealing and considering people's needs – and particularly the needs of the most vulnerable members of society – and guaranteeing rights. They are contributing to solidarity among citizens, to the acceptance of responsibility and, therefore, to democracy.' NGOs could play an even stronger role as places to mobilize solidarity and participation amongst citizens: 'This is the real principle of subsidiarity.' The role of the State remains essential, but practical solidarity must also find its place in civil society on voluntary and consensual bases. NGOs function as mouthpieces of various social groups, including minorities: 'Associations will not allow themselves to be limited to emergency aid and assistance, and invite everyone, including the most vulnerable members of society, to reflect on their situation, to discover its causes and to take control of their lives.'

Again, the job argument was raised, with a reminder that NGOs as social services employ thousands of people, both paid and unpaid. Speaking on behalf of the Platform, zu Eulenburg said there could be no consideration of European social policies without account being taken of the existence of the unique social actors represented by NGOs in the social sector and without, to some extent, depending upon them.

3. Employers

Percy Barnevik, Asea Brown Boveri, Sweden

Percy Barnevik stated that although the European economy is way behind the development in the US, Japan and the Asian countries, that there is no structural reason for this: 'We have the highest level of education, we have a very long industrial tradition behind us and we enjoy the largest market in the world.' He stated that 'the problems are within ourselves and it is among ourselves that we need to find the solutions'. Too many people in Europe are BCs (before computer) instead of being PCs (post computer). Barnevik recommends that the 'card of development via competitiveness' be played. 'Without competitiveness, launching political declarations, pacts and programmes will be of no use.' He sees the key issues as restructuring and adaption of enterprises, investment in training, decentralization and diversification as well as development of innovative production methods. 'But this is impossible without the adaptation of our social systems. We will need flexibility and mobility in the future.' Barnevik is aware of the risk of a polarized society, with, on the one hand, workers who are protected by trade unions whose number and power are constantly diminishing and, on the other hand, a growing mass of workers with no protection

and no status. Barnevik hopes to see a consensus among the three main parties to development: enterprises, who must invest massively in education and training; States, who must build an effective, appropriate system of protection; and the world of work.

4. Trade unions

Ieke van den Burg, FNV, Netherlands

'Social policy is not the cherry on the cake but rather one of the vital ingredients of the cake', stated the representative of the trade unions, Ieke van den Burg. 'Social progress is an end to be reached, whereas the objectives of convergence and monetary policies are merely the means to reach that end.' Van den Burg called on the states attending the IGC to provide a legal basis for social decisions, demanding the integration of the Social Protocol in the Treaty and the extension of the number of decisions that can be taken by a majority vote. She welcomed the ideas of the Comité des Sages and asked in general for legislation which is 'written with more care and clarity'.

The trade unions want to see a rebalancing of social and economic policies, with a strengthening of the powers of European institutions and the Ecofin Council. First and foremost, Europe needs an employment policy: 'and, for us, an employment policy is not simply a question of deciding how work is going to be found for the unemployed; it is a real policy – linked to demand and to needs'. However, van den Burg believed that one important issue had been overlooked at the Forum: 'the issue of informing and consulting workers. This, too, is part of the European social model'. Stressing the importance of dialogue and partnership, van den Burg declared that the trade unions were ready to take part in the process set up by the Forum.

5. European Commission

Padraig Flynn, Commissioner for Employment, Industrial Relations and Social Affairs

'This Social Policy Forum has marked the beginning of an active civil dialogue, a complement to the political dialogue and the social dialogue', stated Commissioner Padraig Flynn. Simultaneous to the debates at the Forum, the Social Councils adopted two long pending directives on parental leave and the posting of workers which had both been proposed by the social partners. This event and the striking participation at this Forum showed the 'shared commitment to the building of a distinctive European social model and it is one of the vital and central messages of the Forum', stated Flynn.

He appreciated the messages of the workshop sessions. With reference to the work of the equal opportunities group he said: 'The practical elimination of all barriers – and of any form of discrimination – to the full participation of all citizens in economic and social life must be a central priority objective for us all.'

Flynn endorsed the broad understanding of the social protection group, that 'our social protection systems must be made more employment-friendly' and reported that

the Social Council 'gave a warm welcome to my initiative to set up a framework of discussion on the future of our social protection systems in the Union'.

He agreed with the participants in the employment session, that it was 'time for social innovation' and strongly supported President Santer's European Confidence Pact. 'The challenge is to transform the ECU 200 billion that the Member States are spending on income maintenance programmees – a de-learning process for 18 million unemployed – into active labour market policies in order to upgrade skills and to integrate the unemployed into the new working life. This must include careful balancing of the mutual rights and obligations of state and individuals.' He asked the NGOs and the social partners to seek a more dynamic involvement in the monitoring committees on the actions supported by the Structural Funds in the Member States.

The Commissioner agreed with the concern some participants expressed in the session of the future of working life: 'There is great potential in this development – but there is also a risk that this development will leave some of our fellow citizens behind.' He promised that the Green Consultative Paper he will present during the summer on the social implications of the information society 'will put people first'.

Flynn said that the Forum had proved an excellent example of bringing to life the civil dialogue at European level and welcomed its success. 'I will examine the messages and suggestions that have emerged during the Forum to see precisely which action points we can build into the social policy action programme over the next period.' The results of the report of the Comité des Sages will also be given close attention. The Commission will convene a second European Social Policy Forum after the end of the IGC. However, Flynn made it clear that it also depends on Forum participants to make their viewpoints known to their authorities at national, regional or local level. Whilst committing himself to finding new ways of developing a strong civil dialogue, fully involving NGOs, Flynn also applied to the NGOs to 're-examine their role, structures, objectives and capacities'. The Commissioner therefore supported Stephen Hughes's proposal on behalf of the Parliament to look for financial resources for an initiative from the Commission to provide support for NGOs for active involvement in deliberations on the subject of the future of European social policy. 'This could involve the compilation of a comparative report about the role and place of NGOs in civil society in the different Member States'. The Commissioner concluded: 'This meeting has been a milestone in shaping European Social Policy.' ■

EUROPEAN SOCIAL POLICY FORUM

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